

# Beginners Guide To Learning Italian



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## 2 The Significance of Learning a Foreign Language

Why is it so important to learn a foreign language? The whole world speaks English, right? You are right there is a large number of people who speak English and are living in a foreign country, but not everyone in the whole world. There are several good and valid reasons for learning to speak another language.

Just for starters, Personal Development is one of the reasons. When you learn a new language you acquire a whole new outlook while reinforcing your own identity and self-confidence. Learning a foreign language can contribute to a stronger personality.

Then there are the Cultural Reasons for learning a foreign language. Cultures define themselves through languages. A foreign language will give you admission into another culture. You will have the ability to communicate and to exchange thoughts and ideas with people all over the world. Without the ability to communicate with them you may have never had the opportunity to know them.

Education is another good reason for learning a foreign language. Learning a foreign language allows you to see things differently than you would have otherwise. It has a positive effect on intellectual growth and allows for the enrichment and enhancement of mental development. Learning a foreign language when you are young is much more effective. It will help you to read and write in your own language. Evidence shows, like musical education, it can contribute to the growth of the individual intelligence.

Economic Reasons is the last reason for learning a foreign language. Living in a world, which is characterized by the international links and intercultural connections, language skills are crucial for business communications. With knowledge of foreign language, you will increase your job opportunities. In many careers, knowing a foreign language is a useful asset.

So why did you choose Italian? Maybe you fell in love with countryside on your first visit, or maybe you want to know the language before you make that first visit. Possibly you have family in Italy and you would like to be able to speak to them. Many Americans have family in Italy and to converse with their family members they must speak Italian. There are several reasons people choose to learn Italian. The reason is inconsequential. What matters most is that you are doing it.

You should probably also know that if you have children and would like for them to experience intellectual, it is much best for them to learn a foreign language during their younger years. Children who learn a second language while growing up have the ability to think in both languages. They will also have an easier time at reading and writing in school as well as the ability to process information differently than children taught only one language during their formative years. Your children will also have a better chance of learning several additional languages, even after they are grown. A child learning a second language during their early years will have a higher intellect than

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children who don't. You will be doing your children a great service by allowing them to learn a foreign language while they are growing up.

### 3 History of the Italian Language

The Italian language is a member of the Romance group of the Italic subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages. It is the predominately spoken language on the peninsula called Italy. However, you might be surprised to know that Italian is also spoken in southern Switzerland, San Marino, Sicily, northern Sardinia, and on the northeastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, as well as in North and South America.

Italian is the direct offspring of the Latin spoken by the Romans and forced by them on the peoples under their control. Italian preserves the closest resemblance to Latin than all the other Romance languages.

During the evolution period of the Italian language, several dialects sprang up. The assortment of these dialects and their individual claims by their native speakers as true Italian speech presented difficulty in the evolution of an accepted form of Italian, which would reflect the cultural unity of the peninsula of Italy.

Even the earliest popular documents, which were produced in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, were written in a dialect of Italian. During the next three centuries Italian writers wrote in their native dialects, which resulted in the production of several competing regional schools of literature.

It was in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Tuscan dialect became more predominate. This could be due to the central position of Tuscany in Italy as well as the aggressive commerce of the city of Florence. The Tuscan dialect deviated very little in the formation of words and the sound of words from the classical Latin. Because of this, it harmonized with the Italian traditions of the Latin culture the best. Most of all, Florentine culture formed the three literary artists who summarized Italian thought and the feeling of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance the best. These artists were Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio.

The attempt of establish a unified norm for the Italian language occupied writers of all dialects. During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the grammar specialists of the time tried putting their heads together to decide upon a norm for the pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Tuscan, which was at the time the status of a central and classical Italian speech. Eventually this meeting of the minds, which could have ended with Italian being another dead language, was broadened to include the organic changes, which are inevitable in a living tongue.

In the dictionaries and the publications of the Accadcmia della Crusca, which was created in 1583 was accepted by Italians as the authority in Italian matters of language compromised between classical purism and living Tuscan usage were successfully achieved. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the most important literary event did not take place in Florence.

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Pietro Bembo, a Venetian, set out in 1525 his proposals for a standardized language and style. His models were Petrarca and Boccaccio and as a result became the modern classic. Therefore, the language of Italian literature was and still is modeled after the Italian spoken in Florence in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Finally in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the language spoken by educated Tuscans spread and became the language of the new nation of Italy. In 1861, the unification of Italy had a dramatic effect on the political scene as well as the social, economical, and cultural transformation.

Because of mandatory schooling, the number of people with the ability to read increased and many Italians abandoned their native dialect in favor of the national language.

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## 4 Italian Words Used in the English Language

Italian words have made their way into English over the course of many centuries, you will be happy to know that you already are using quite a bit of Italian. If you are a musician, you will be familiar with the terms such as bel canto, cello, mezzosoprano, pianoforte, and solo. Structural design has borrowed words like cupola, loggia, and stanza. Of course then there is Italian foods such as ravioli, mozzarella, lasagna, vermicelli, or porcini. During the course of some everyday lives the Italian words, such as paparazzi, graffiti, mafia, and ghetto are used every day. As you can see your vocabulary already consists of several Italian words.

Because of the growing influence of American culture through the media, this has become a two-way street. There are many English words, which have been adopted by the Italians. They even have a name for these words. It is called Itangliano, which translates into highly anglicized Italian. Some of these words are club, flirt, shopping, spray, and style. When visiting Italy, it may seem you hear more English spoken than Italian in the cities where tourism is heavy, such as Florence, Rome and Venice.

Politicians and academics have made a series of efforts to defend the Italian language against what is known as Italenglish or Itangliano. A campaign against English phrases and grammar was launched by the members of Parliament because of the stream into their culture and language, and threatening to kill off Italian. Just recently Italian officials vowed to simplify the manner in which the state communicates with its citizens by declaring war on officialese.

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## 5 Misconceptions about Learning Italian

You may or may not have heard some of the misconceptions about learning Italian. It all boils down to how much you want to learn Italian or would you rather sit around and make excuses as to why you can't. Learning Italian is not unlike going on a diet or start an exercise regime. You can dig in and get started, or you can come up with the excuses as to why you can't do it. Many of these excuses can be very convincing, so if you want to learn Italian, don't listen to the excuses.

One of the most common misconceptions is Italian is more difficult to learn than English. Actually research shows Italian is easier to learn than English. Ignoring the scientific facts, when you were a child learning English, you didn't know whether it was easy or difficult. You really didn't know any better, so you didn't think about it. When learning Italian to help you through those frustrating periods, you will need to remember that everyone was a beginner at some time in their life. Also it might help you to remember that making mistakes is how one learns how to do it right.

You may think you will not be able to roll your r's, but the fact is many Italians can not roll their r's either. In Italy what is known as the "soft r" is in many cases a result of a regional accent or dialect. It is also traditionally associated with the speech of the upper class. The Italians from the north of Italy, close to the French border, are famous for this type of speech variation because of the influence of the French language on the local dialect.

If you want to learn to roll your r's you should try placing your tongue on the roof of your mouth, close to the front and trill your tongue. If that doesn't work, then pretend you are revving up a car motor or repeat the following English words a several times; ladder, or butter. You might also remember that Rrrrruffles have rrrrridges from the TV commercial.

You may believe there aren't any schools close to your home. In this day and time of the Internet a school being close at hand is no longer necessary. You can take courses online, listen to an Italian audio course, or even find an Italian pen pal. There are many ways you can learn Italian and the Internet can help you. Some of the online courses are free and you study on your own time. You are not set to a rigid schedule.

If you believe you will never use Italian, you might want to rethink. There are many ways for you to utilize your Italian. In many cases opportunities will present themselves once you have learned some Italian. If all else fails, learn Italian and then write a book, or a letter to your Italian pen pal.

Thinking you are too old to learn Italian is just silly. You are never too old to learn something new. There is no age limit on learning Italian. If you live to be 100 years old you could learn Italian as long as you have the willingness and the commitment to the time it will take to learn Italian. Age does not count in this scenario.

If you close nit group of friends do not speak Italian, there are ways around that. No you don't have to make them learn just so you will have someone to converse and

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practice your Italian with. Instead you can contact the Italian department at your local college, or call the Italian American organization. They often sponsor wine tasting and other events where participants can meet and mingle to practice Italian. You can even join your local Italian Language Meetup group. Their website is Meetup.com. They organize the Italian Language Meetup as a free gathering at a local venue for anyone interested in learning, practicing, or teaching Italian.

If you feel your time is limited, there are ten ways to speak Italian quickly, which we will cover in this e-book. The fastest way to learn Italian is in a total immersion course. By spending two weeks at a language school in Italy you will learn Italian more effectively than in a full year in high school or college. It will cost you less than a vacation. The mornings are usually devoted to the classes, but in the afternoon you are at leisure to visit the churches, museums, and other sites.

If you are certain native Italians will never understand you, you might want to know that the more effort you put into it, the chances are good they will be able to manage to understand what you are saying. One of the most important aspects of learning Italian is building your self-esteem. The more you try to express yourself, the quicker you will learn the language.

If you are only planning a short visit to Italy, then you will need to know the Italian survival phrases, such as “Where is the bathroom?” Then of course there are some of the more mundane aspects of Italian, like making heads or tails from the Italian menu in order to order your dinner, lunch, etc.

If you are one of those that needs a textbook to read to learn Italian, that is not a problem. If you can find a bookstore chances are you will be able to find the textbook you need. If you need workbooks to complete, you may have to sign up for a course. There are many ways to learn Italian and they all work. However, the shotgun approach is recommended to avoid becoming bored or frustrated.

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## 6 Learning to Speak Italian Quickly

We live in an age of instant messaging and microwave pizzas. We even have language instructors promising you will learn a language in just one weekend. I am not sure about learning a language in a weekend, but here are some tips, which will help you learn Italian quickly.

The first suggestion is to go to Italy. Submerge yourself in the language. You will be forced to speak only in Italian. You will learn Italian quickly and have the opportunity to see the paintings of Raffaello and the Roman ruins while you are learning. However, some of us do not have the time to spend in Italy to learn the language. So we will move on to some of the other suggestions.

You could find Italian-speaking people in your town or neighborhood, so you can practice your Italian. There are several cities around the country that have Italian cultural institutes, which have language exchange programs. If you are unable to locate such a place, you might be able to find an Italian conversation group. Many times Italian conversation groups are sponsored by bookstores or sometimes the Italian American societies.

One of the most important skills of learning a language is learning to understand the language when someone else is speaking it. In these days and times several cable companies broadcast Italian programming for about an hour every day. This may just be news from the state television channel. There are also several radio stations accessible from the Internet such as Radio Marte.

You could go out and rent an Italian movie without the subtitles or dubbing. This is a great way to learn Italian. You will have the opportunity to hear Italian spoken by many different actors, which will give your ears the training they need at the same time.

You can always check out the library. There you should be able to find Italian novels, travel guides and books which will describe Italy. These books will help you improve your learning experience. The parallel-text version, which has Italian and English side by side, will be found in some of the Italian classics, such as La Divina Commedia, also known as The Divine Comedy.

If you buy yourself a music CD in Italian, you might yourself humming along. While you are at it read the Liner Notes found in the case of the CD. Many times the lyrics to the songs are in them, and then you can try singing along.

You want learning Italian to be fun, so you can play some of your favorite games in Italian. Work an Italian crossword puzzle or if you are really feeling gutsy, try your hand at Italian scrabble. In order to prevent you from losing interest and getting frustrated make learning Italian fun!

Use post-it-notes. Take a pad of post-it-notes, write the Italian word for the items you look at everyday in your house, and post the sticky note on it. By saying the name of the item out loud every time you see the item, soon it will be automatic. You will find

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yourself looking at the item and automatically thinking the word in Italian. Plus it is a great way to increase your vocabulary.

As you learn Italian you will find a phrase which will be your favorite, such as “thank you” in Italian, which is “mille grazie”. You will find yourself using this phrase every time someone does you a favor. So every time you learn a new essential phrase you are broadening your word power. Listen to the Italian word of the day. Try using it in a sentence, and soon you will be speaking like a native Italian.

You can get one-on-one instruction or take a group class. The routine and the structure will help you develop a base for advancing quickly in the language. La Bella Lingua is a school which offers a program, which is designed to make learning Italian fun and easy. They have a special hands-on class you might want to try.

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## 7 Total Concentration – The Best Way to Learn Italian

The quickest and the most successful way to learn Italian is the total-immersion or concentration method. This includes traveling to Italy for an long vacation, studying in one of the many language schools located all over Italy, and conversing only in Italian. Many programs include a component which improves the cultural exchange. You will literally eat, breathe, and dream in Italian.

Because many of us do not have the opportunity to spend weeks or months in Italy to learn the language, while touring the ruins, sipping an espresso, or meandering through the museums, there are other ways to learn Italian without leaving your hometown.

Actually you have taken a very important step toward learning Italian when you decided to read this book. The most important part of learning Italian is to start studying. Any method you choose will work whether you decide to read an Italian textbook, take a course in Italian at a university or a local language school, do exercises in an Italian workbook, listening to a tape or CD, or even just talking to a native Italian speaker.

It is a good habit to spend some time every day reading, writing, speaking and listening to Italian. This will help you in becoming accustomed to the language. Your confidence will build one baby step at a time, your accent will become less apparent, your vocabulary will increase and you'll be communicating in Italian before you know it. You might even start speaking Italian with your hands.

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## 8 Methods to Improve Your Italian

When you take a class to learn Italian, you will review definite articles, direct object pronouns, and preposition. Your instructor will probably show you how to pronounce Italian words and there will probably be an Italian audio lab. You will come to a point where you will want to learn some shortcuts and quick pointers, which will give your lessons more power. Here are some things they don't teach in language lessons that will improve your Italian.

In Italian basically it is "What you see is what you hear". When you see an Italian speaking native open his mouth wide, it isn't always to shout as much as it is to properly pronounce the big, round vowels. As an example, if you want to pronounce the letter "a", you open your mouth wide and say "ahhhhh".

By remembering the phrase what you see is what you hear you will have no trouble spelling and pronouncing the Italian words. Because Italian is a phonetic language most words are pronounced just as they are written.

Many of the Italian words look like English words and have similar meanings. This makes learning Italian a little easier. There are only minor differences in the spelling between the English and the Italian words called cognates. They are called cognates because of their similarities. In Italian they are called parole simili. Some of the cognates are stazione or station, museo or museum, professore or professor, and intelligente or intelligent.

There are other words in Italian, which are similar to English words, but have a different meaning. These words are known as false cognates or falsi amici. For example parente means relative, not parent, and libreria means bookstore, not library.

Because the endings of conjugated verb forms indicate person and number, Italian subject pronouns can be left out unless they are needed to clarify, when they have been modified by the word "also" or "anche", or when there is an emphasis or a contrast needed. If you are starting a first-person comment with "io", such as "I study", or "I walk", it sounds as though you are constantly calling attention to yourself, so in most cases the "io" is left off the comment.

Remember to slow down. Being fast only counts in a car race; fast does not make you fluent in the language and easily understood. When many of us speak in English, we are notorious for slurring our words together. When speaking in Italian it is better to allow the Italian vowels and consonants to maintain their particular, unchanging sound. Just relax and take a deep breathe so that you can enjoy the language at a leisurely pace.

When it comes to adjectives, you can only say molto bene so many times before you start becoming bored with yourself. There are times when Italian adjectives, which are the most expressive words, get short-changed because of the usual emphasis on the nouns and the verbs. You can learn alternative ways to express yourself by including

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the use of prefixes, such as *stra* and suffixes, such as *ino*, *etto*, *ello*, and *accio*. You will quickly increase your vocabulary by doing so.

When it comes to formalities, you will see how shopkeepers, neighbors, and guests perceive you when you ingratiate yourself with them. It is good to remember your manners and you're more likely to be greeted with a smile. Learn the essential survival words and phrases in Italian and chances are they will help you with your language skills.

About the courteous form of address in Italian, there are four ways of saying you in Italian *tu*, *voi*, *Lei*, and *Loro*. *Tu*, for one person, *voi*, for two or more people are the forms only used with family members, children and close friends. When speaking to an Italian they may ask "Possiamo darci del tu?" which means "May we switch to the tu form?" after a relationship has progressed. This is the sign that you are now able to use the more common form *tu*.

Err, umm, ah, like you know are conversation fillers, which make you sound like a teenager or worse. The fact is you know what you want to say, but at that moment you are temporarily incoherent. One remedy for this is to practice interjections, sentence starters, and additional useful phrases, which will help get your tongue started and back on track. You can commit your favorite snappy answers to memory to help you avoid those blank moments when you are at a loss for words.

Talking loudly does not make you understood, it just makes you loud. Many people have a bad habit of almost screaming when asked to repeat themselves. You may just need to polish up your Italian skills. Those you are speaking to are probably not hard of hearing. You may have mispronounced the word or maybe you just used the wrong choice of words. So don't shout at them, they may be able to hear just fine.

There is one thing you will notice when you spend time in Italy, and that is Italians dress to impress. They may just be taking their ritual evening walk or stepping out to the opera. Italians want to look good. So when you go to Italy and are visiting the churches and the museums, you may want to leave the shorts and sandals at the hotel. It will improve your confidence among all those well-dressed Italians, which can help you improve your Italian.

There will be times that no matter how well you say something in Italian, sometimes it will be difficult for even a linguist to interpret. It could be what you are say and not how you are saying it that is the problem. The cultural differences become increasingly apparent when speaking a foreign language. If you are sure that what you are saying is grammatical correct and you are still receiving blank stares, you might try a different approach.

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## 9 Italian Language Help Online

Even though you might want to email Dante Alighieri to ask him questions about Italian grammar and usage, you are unable to because he is no longer living. Even if he were still alive chances are he would be tied up in writing his new book, or a screenplay for one of the books he has already written, such as the La Divina Commedia.

However, there are more practical solutions to your dilemma. The national language academy of Italy can be access through the Internet and they can offer help to those wanting to master the Italian language. There is also the oldest language academy in Europe, the Accademia della Crusca who also can be accessed through the Internet. The consulenza linguistica section of the website has answers to the most frequently asked questions. They also have a site where visitors can consult the online library, which contains the first Italian vocabulary from 1612 as well as other historic publications.

On the Internet you will also be able to find other resources for asking questions regarding Italian grammar, dialect and usage. If you need help with pronunciation or translating a phrase or maybe you want a recommendation on schools in Italy. The About Italian Language Forum is a great place to find answers.

The forum is a place where you can chat about verb conjugation, grammar, pronunciation or anything related to the Italian language. Some of the more recent message threads were discussions about: il discorso indiretto, help with translating a passage from Luigi Pirandello, and the right way to learn Italian. On the forum you are able to post your notes and comments on the About Italian Language bulletin board and you will receive input from a variety of people who are enthusiastic about the Italian language.

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## 10 If You Think Like an Italian, You Will Speak Like an Italian

When learning to speak a language like a native, you will need to forget your native tongue. Spending time in Italy speaking only Italian will help you speak as a native. If you want to read Italian, you can pick up an Italian newspaper and read the section that interests you most. The goal is to increase competency in Italian. To do that you must learn to think like an Italian, which means you will need to take off the training wheels so to speak. Get rid of those helpers, which are holding you back and hurt more than they help.

For instance bilingual dictionaries are a crutch. If your goal is to speak Italian, speaking English to your friends will be a waste of your time. You don't want to make grammatical comparisons between English and Italian because it won't help you achieve your goal. Every language has rules and forms, which are unique and sometimes illogical. If you want to speak with competence, translating back and forth in your head before speaking or reading is a fool's errand, which will not get you anywhere.

Too many people consider language as a science and get tongue-tied. Students of the language obsess over details. Italian can not be dissected, instead of just speaking the language and interacting with native speakers. They should be imitating them and copying them in order to learn the language. You need to let go of your ego and pretend you are an actor by trying to sound Italian. Books with something to memorize turns off most students and these books are not useful.

The best piece of advice someone can give to anyone studying Italian, regardless of the level of study, would be to stop thinking in English. To competently speak Italian you have to forget about English grammar. You will not be able to translate literally and construct sentences according to English grammar.

One important fact you should know is that all languages are not equal and are not interchangeable. If languages could be interchangeable, translation would be extremely simple and straightforward. Learning another language would boil down to nothing more than learning to substitute one word for another.

The fact is each language differs in very important ways, in grammar as well as vocabulary. Each language has a unique way of looking at the world. No one can become fluent in a language until they stop translating and simply think in the new language. Each language has its own distinctive medium of thought.

You must let go of your fear of making mistakes. Your goal should only be to communicate. You really don't want to sound as if you have a PhD in Italian grammar because not only will you never accomplish that, but there are very few Italians who can speak that well in their own language. But all Italians can communicate their emotions, fears, wants, and needs. The one thing that will hold you back is using English as a crutch and being afraid of opening your mouth wide enough to speak the language.

Don't be discouraged, but many of the language learners just don't seem to understand the concept and they never will. It's a lot like taking dance lessons. You can take

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lessons from an expert with the cut-out feet and numbers on the floor to show the steps, but without rhythm, you will never get it right. You will end up looking like a klutz no matter how hard you practice or the number of lessons you take.

Memorizing scripted responses when learning a foreign language does not work. The majority of the textbooks for the beginners have several pages of dialogue. The dialogue is stiff and is a conversation you won't have even in your own language. If you ask a person one of the questions from that dialogue and they don't answer according to the dialogue you memorized, then what?

You are lost and have no idea what to say next. This is not learning the language; this is memorized scripts. Unfortunately with scripts, not everyone has the same script you do; leaving you with the inability to respond to unexpected answer.

When it comes to learning Italian or any other foreign language, you will want to speak it as well as you can speak English. Memorizing scripts don't work, which means you have to learn how to formulate sentences in Italian just as you can in English.

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## 12 Learn the Common Errors to Avoid

After you have learned quite a bit of Italian and you are comfortable with the Italian verbs and can congiuntivo trapassato, which in English means past perfect conjunctive or compound tense. If you are still repeating grammatical mistakes, you will never sound like an Italian native. It's these little grammatical errors, habit or tics, which will always give you away as a native English speaker regardless of how well you speak the language.

As your lessons progressed your instructor, or Italian friends have made a point in telling about these Italian grammatical errors, and you are still making them. Sometimes those particular Italian lessons just didn't stay in your mind. Here is a list of some of the mistakes made by English speakers, which will make them stick out in a crowd no matter how well their pronunciation of the Italian words.

It is not unusual for English speakers to have a problem pronouncing double consonants in Italian. Unlike English and because Italian is a phonetic language you must pronounce both consonants. If it will make it easier for you then say it and write it, say it and write it. This will prevent you from asking for pain, which is pena instead of pen, which is penna.

Many of the students of Italian, especially the beginner's have a tendency to stick with what they are familiar with. Once the beginners learn the three modal verbs, which include potere, which means to be able to or can, they will then come up with many sentences beginning with the word "Posse....?" attempting to sound tactful, when the verb riuscire, which means to succeed, to manage, to be able, is a more accurate verb. This is a quirk which will identify the speaker as a person for whom English is their madrelingua meaning native tongue.

For those students who are studying English as their second language, it may seem as if there is no rhythm or reason for the use of prepositions. For those who are studying Italian, they seem to have the same problem. As a student of Italian you will need to reconcile the fact that just as in English, there are few rules and many exceptions when it comes to the use of prepositions in Italian. By accepting that fact as soon as you possibly can, you will be able to move forward in the process of learning the language much quicker. There is one sure way to approach the prepositions and that is to commit to memory the use of the simple prepositions, such as a, con, da, di, in, per, su and tra and fra, which are interchangeable.

For a person reasonably fluent in the English language as a second language, there are certain usages of words and phrases you will never hear them speak, such as replacing the word says with the word goes. There are several other words and phrases, which are not part of the formal English grammar but are used commonly by us during casual conversations. You will not find these phrases or the improper usage of words in the formal or the written language.

Italian is not that different. There are several words and phrases in Italian, which have minimal meaning in the language, but serve important functions within the language.

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When a person is having a conversation and never uses those words sound slightly overly formal. The words are difficult to translate, but mastering them will make you sound as if you fit into the norm.

Italians will use body language and hand gestures to emphasize a point and add just a little more meaning than the word or phrase is missing on its own. Since you don't want to be mistaken for the indifferent, non-native Italian, learn a few Italian hand gestures and other nonverbal responses.

Upon asking an American the colors of the flag of Italy and most of them will tell you rosso, bianco, e verde, which means red, white and green. Even though the colors are correct the order in which they were said will sound grating to most native ears. If someone said the colors of the American flag were blue, white and red, it would sound the same to us as using the red, white and green is to the Italians. We have had the red, white and blue ingrained into our society and into the DNA of our language that saying the colors of our flag any other way is just not the same.

The same holds true for the Italian. To respond correctly to the question of the colors of their flag, you should answer verde, bianco, e rosso or green, white and red. It may seem as a trivial difference, but it will tag you as a non-native speaking Italian.

Here in America as the winter months fade away and the spring and summer starts warming up you will see many Americans dining outside whether it is at home or in a restaurant. Many restaurants have outside setting areas and as Americans we refer to this as dining al fresco. There are several restaurants named Al fresco all across the United States.

When you make your next trip to Italy and upon arriving at your favorite restaurant for lunch, the hostess will ask you if you want to dine indoors or outdoors. The hostess will probably snicker if you tell her you want to dine al fresco. In Italian the word al fresco means in the cooler, which is a slang term for being in jail or prison. If you wish to dine on the patio in a restaurant in Italy you will be better off using the term all'aperto or all'areia aperta or even fuori.

Another term English speakers have a tendency to misuse include il Bel Paese when referring to Italy. The phrase is the name of a popular Italian cheese. It is similar to a native New Yorker referring to New York City as The Big Apple. They almost never say it. Another phrase usually found in English textbooks or travel guides is la bella lingua when referring to the Italian language. Native Italians don't use that phrase either when referring to the native tongue.

Humor and proverbs are probably the most difficult to learn when learning a foreign language. Many times they are idiomatic and usually reflect the culture. For instance Italian proverbs are usually agrarian or nautical in nature due to the country's background. Consider this English proverb "The early bird catches the worm". An Italian proverb which reflects the same meaning is "Chi dorme non piglia pesci", which means "Who sleeps doesn't catch fishes".

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Language experts will tell you that by speaking proverbs one learns about the language and about the tradition and more about the culture.

If you want to immediately become known as a non-native Italian speaker, continue the use subject pronouns as a language crutch even after you have learned how to conjugate Italian verbs.

Differing from the English language the use of subject pronouns is not necessary and the use is considered to be redundant unless used for emphasis because the verb endings identify the mood, tense, person, number and in some cases gender.

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## 13 Track Your Family Heritage

Many Italian Americans are learning Italian to get in touch with their family heritage. They are basically looking for way to identify, understand and bond with their family's ethnic background. By learning their family's native tongue they are able to use it as a tool to uncover their family roots when they visit Italy.

It must be a very touching, emotional experience to go to the town in Italy where their grandparents lived and grew up. During the visit there is the chance of running into an old friend of your grandparents or a cousin they didn't know existed. They are also able to use their family's native tongue in order to read the birth certificates and marriage license of the family members they never had the opportunity to meet. By learning the Italian language many Italian Americans feel connected to their ancestors who are no longer of this world.

There are many reasons to study a foreign language. It is a method by which an American can bond with other generations of their family. A large part of the Americans who have enrolled in Italian language courses have traveled to Italy for pleasure and to visit their ancestor's homeland. There are many personal benefits to be received from studying a foreign language and learning Italian can be priceless.

In the past several years, baby boomers are aging and they have an increase of free time. Because of this there has been an increase in the number of students learning the Italian language for their family heritage. The ability to read, speak and understand the Italian language is a powerful motivation for adults to learn the language. People yearn for that connection to their past and learning Italian will give it to them.

If you are searching for Italian genealogical resources, there is a vast amount of information to be found online to help you discover your family history. The Italian Ancestry has a website along with a magazine in print to help you with your search. Also the Sicilian surname directory is a database of surnames, which are specifically focused on that island. At the Genealogy Helplist For Italy you will find a group of volunteers who are willing to help those who are looking for information. They will get the information you need from the institutions in their area or they will supply other information, which is accessible to them.

As an organization devoted to the research of immigrant family roots of Italian origin, the International Thematic Research can be of a great service to those looking for the family heritage. If you are looking for assistance in deciphering Italian records, My Italian Family provides research services using a network of professional genealogists with extensive experience in deciphering Italian records. These are not the only resources you have available to you if you are looking for information regarding your ancestry in Italy. If you go online, you will find several other Italian genealogy search tools and articles.

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## 14 Romance Languages

When you think of romance, your mind might go to a candlelight dinner, a bottle of Champagne, roses, or strawberries dipped in chocolate. The last thing, if it ever came to mind, would be Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese.

What are Romance languages? When discussing language, Romance languages are the descendants of the spoken form of Latin, which is also known as Vulgar Latin. The word vulgar in this instance does not mean coarse or off-color. It means common or the usual, typically, everyday speech of regular people.

The languages considered to be Romance languages are modern French, Italian, Spanish, Romanian, Catalan, the Romansch group of dialects used in Switzerland, and Sardinian. Also included are the languages Occitan and Provençal from France, Andalusian from Spain, Friulian from northeast Italy, Ladin from northern Italy, and Sicilian from southern Italy.

Many of the Romance languages are regional dialects rather than the national language of the country where they are spoken. They have been classified together because they have a shared section of vocabulary, which originated in the influence of the language of the Roman conquerors. Today there are nearly 625 million people who speak Romance languages.

Italian like the other Romance languages is the direct offspring of the Latin spoken by the Roman conquerors, which was forced on them by these Romans. Of all the major Romance languages, Italian kept the closest to the original Latin.

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## 15 The Dialects of the Italian Language

When dining in Italy, there is one thing you will notice right off la cucina locale, which means the local cuisine. This is not unlike here in our own country. If you live in Texas, you will find on the menu of most restaurants an entrée called “Chicken Fried Steak”. Once you cross the Texas state border, you will not find “Chicken Fried Steak” almost anywhere else in the country. In Italy every region has their own specialty and methods of preparing the dish, which will depend on the season, the local produce and any other ingredients. So it stands to reason most regions have their own accent, dialect and sometimes their own language.

The various languages and dialects have evolved over centuries and remained distinct from the standard Italian for several reasons, such as the inability to travel, no radio or TV until the twentieth century and the attempt to maintain their cultural heritage and independence.

The dialects have many distinct qualities, which distinguish them from others. Just as an example the Neapolitan dialect is the most widely known because of its use in popular songs. The speakers of this dialect clip the articles to single vowels. In Romanesco the letter “r” replaces the letter “l”, so instead of pronouncing the word volta meaning once, they would pronounce the word as vorta.

In all the regions of Italy schoolchildren learn the standard Italian and sometimes their regional dialect also. What is now known as the standard Italian has evolved from the Tuscan dialect it started from to the common language of Italy.

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## 17 Traveling in Italy and other Countries

If you visit Italy and don't speak Italian, it will appear as if everyone speaks Italian but you. That is not necessarily true. There are several languages spoken in Italy other than Italian along with several dialects of Italian.

Most regions have their own dialect, accent and even their own language. The languages spoken in Italy have evolved over the centuries. The different dialects are all noticeably different from the standard Italy.

Italian is known as an Indo-European language and currently there are over 55 million speakers of Italian in Italy. Some of the individuals are bilingual in Italian and some of the regional dialects. There are an additional 6.5 million people who speak Italian in other countries.

Besides Italy, Italian is spoken in several countries, which include Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, Libya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Paraguay, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay, USA, and Vatican State.

There are several regional dialects spoken in Italy. The major dialects of Italian include toscano, abruzzese, pugliese, umbro, laziale, marchigiano centrale, cicolano-reatino-aquilano, and molisano.

Because of the different regions of Italy, there are also different languages spoken in Italy other than the standard Italian. Those languages include emiliano-romagnolo, friulano, ligure, Lombardo, napoletano, piemontese, sardarese, sardu, siciliano and Veneto. Some of these languages are known by different names, which are not listed here.

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## 19 You are What You Speak

When you are listening to two people speak a foreign language, does it seem they are able to rattle off words at about 78 rpm? You feel like you are doing well at speaking about 33 rpm. Research was published in the January, 2000 issue of Nature Neuroscience. The findings of this research stated the primary language a person is raised with affects the way he or she thinks and processes information. Italian and British college students were studied and it was found the Italians read and process information faster, even when reading words from other languages.

These findings were of no great surprise to language experts who have stated for years that our primary language forms our minds and our perceptions. As an example western language is written and read from left to right and from top to bottom. It is believed that a Westerner will look a photograph starting with the top and moving downward to the bottom, where as people from Asian nations, who read from right to left and from bottom to the top process visuals differently than the Westerners.

The major breakthrough in this research, which was performed by Italian and British scientists, was that it brought what is believed to be the first proof that language has an impact on our brain physiology. The brain scans of the student showed Italians to have more active superior temporal regions, while the British have more active frontal and posterior inferior temporal regions.

The immediate importance of the study, according to the researchers, is in the teaching of the language and reading. They believe it to play a role in future anthropological research seeking to explain the differences between cultures.

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## 20 Italian Survival Phrases

### Greetings

This is the first category in the essential phrases for travelers.. Here are the greetings.

Salve! – Hello!  
Pronto! – Hello! When you answer the phone  
Ciao! – Hi! or bye, bye!  
Buon giorno! –Good morning!  
Buon pomeriggio – Good afternoon!  
Buona sera! – Good evening!  
Come sta? – How are you?  
Come va? – How're you doing?  
Ci sentiamo bene – We're feeling fine.  
Grazie, va bene cosi – Thanks, just fine

### Introductions

Another part of the essential phrases for travelers is the introduction. Here is a list of introductions in Italian along with the English counterpart.

Mi chiamo Michele – My name is Michael  
Piacere di conosceria – Pleased to meet you  
Questa e mia moglie – This is my wife  
Questo e mio marito – This is my husband  
Come si chiama? – What is your name?  
Di dov'e? – Where are you from?  
Dove lavora? – Where do you work?  
Che cosa studia? – What are you studying?  
Lei abita qui? – Do you live here?  
Siamo qui da una settimana – We've been here for a week

### How to Ask Questions in Italian

Who is Carlo? Where is the bathroom? What time is it? Why do you run? How do you make pesto? This is a quick how to instruction on how to ask the right questions in Italian.

1. Questions asked beginning with a questioning word, the subject is usually placed at the end of the sentence. Example: Quando guarda la TV Michele? – When does Michael watch TV?
2. Chi? Means Who? Or Whom?
3. To ask Which (one) or Which (ones) use Quale? Or Quali? Plural
4. Che: means What? Or What kind of?

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5. If you are asking about How much? Or How many? Use Quanto/a/i/e?
6. Come? Indicates How?
7. To ask Why? Us Perché?
8. Quando? (Che cosa è, cos'è) says in English What is...? In a request for a definition or an explanation.
9. Dove? means Where?

**Here are a few tips when forming a question in Italian:**

1. Che and cosa are abbreviated forms of che cosa. The forms are interchangeable.
2. As with all adjective, the questioning adjectives agrees in gender and number with the nouns they modify, except for che, which stays the same.
3. Prepositions such as a, di, con, and per always precede the questioning che. In Italian, a question will never end with a preposition.

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## 23 Beginning Italian

In checking out Italian courses this is an online course and what they offer for beginners only. Beyond “Italian for Beginners” is not listed here. This is just to give you an idea of what to expect when you start taking instructions on how to speak Italian whether it be in a classroom online or a correspondence course.

Lessons -The lessons they offer are simple, direct lesson in grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

Audio Phrasebook – You will be able to build your vocabulary with a glossary of essential terms by topic with audio.

Exercises – You will have workbook exercises, worksheets, drills and activities to help you as you are learning Italian.

Buon Divertimento – Included with your vocabulary and other studies you will learn some Italian humor, by learning to read Italian jokes, puns, and riddles. You want your learning to be fun, don't you?

Verbs – You will learn the essential information on Italian verb formation, moods, tenses, conjugation charts, and how to use them.

Study Guide – They will give you a study guide to challenge what you have learned and test your knowledge of the various topics of Italian language.

Audio Lab – You will have a word of the day to learn to help you increase your vocabulary, along with survival phrases, a pronunciation guide, and more. Listen to a native Italian speaker.

Articles About Italian – You will have the opportunity to read articles on Italian language, culture, history, and current events.

Italian Proverbs – These are saying much like those we have in English. These are words to live by as seen from the perspective of an Italian with English translations.

Abbreviations and Acronyms – You will have access to a glossary of Italian abbreviations, acronyms, and initials.

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## 24 Italian Verbs

As a student learning Italian you will have a tendency to look for grammatical patterns. This is normal. Studying Italian verbs in a regulated fashion is a wise idea. In other words take it in as a computer would accept a new program, without thinking about it or trying to analysis it. Mainly because it is an efficient use of time, plus Italian verbs are grouped in a variety of ways.

When studying Italian you must avoid the temptation of making comparisons in English. They are not even remotely the same and you will only end up frustrating yourself. There may be some similarities between the two languages, but there are so many basic differences they can not compare to each other. As in the English language there are many exceptions to the rules.

Verbs are a basic part of ever language, so the same is true with Italian. There are three primary groups of verbs in Italian. They are grouped according to the ending of their infinitives. There is the first conjugation (-are verbs), second conjugation (-ere verbs), and third conjugation (-ire verbs).

The majority of the Italian verbs belongs to the first conjugation group and follows a very consistent pattern. Once you have mastered the conjugation of on –are verb, in essence you will have learned hundreds. The second conjugation verbs total about one quarter of the verbs. Many of them have some sort of erratic structure; there are also many regular – ere verbs. The final group of verbs is those that end in –ire.

In Italian there is a difference between tense and moody. Mood refers to the attitude of the speaker to what he or she is saying. The attitude is not directed at the person they are speaking to. There are four finite moods – modi finite in Italian is pinpointing, which is used when pinpointing facts; subjunctive – congiuntivo, which is used to express how the speaker feels or his attitude toward an event; conditional – condizionale, which is used to express what would happen in a certain situation that is hypothetical and imperative – imperative, which is used to give orders. The English language only has three of these finite moods. They are indicative, subjunctive, and imperative.

There are also three indefinite moods in Italian; the forms do not specify the person, such as first, second, or third. They are infinitive – infinito, participle – participio and gerund – gerundio.

Moods are divided into one or more tenses, which tell the time when the action of the verb takes place whether it is present, past or future.

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## Conjugating Italian Verbs

There are six different verb forms for all of the Italian verb tenses in the four finite moods; each verb form corresponds with each of the six persons used as the subject.

### Singular

First person  
Second person  
Third person

### Plural

First person  
Second person  
Third person

Learning all six of the forms for every verb could be a daunting task. Fortunately most Italian verbs are regular verbs, meaning they are conjugated using a regular pattern. There are only three erratic first conjugation verbs. Once you have the regular verb endings memorized the pattern can be applied to other verbs of the same group. If they are irregular they do not follow a normal pattern.

Even though they are numerous, even the irregular second and third conjugation verbs fall into a few groups, which make it easier to memorize.

You can't speak Italian without the verbs *essere* – to be and *avere* – to have. These two verbs are essential and are used in compound verb formations, along with idiomatic expressions, and many other grammatical constructions. You will want to become the master of these two verbs because it is a giant step toward learning Italian.

Next is the transitive verb. These are the verbs that take a direct object, such as in *Luis reads a book*. Transitive verbs can also be used in the unconditional sense, which means with an implicit direct object “reads a book”. Intransitive verbs on the other hand are those that never take a direct object “Giorgio walks”. Some verbs can be classified as either transitive or intransitive, depending on the context of the sentence.

Italian verbs have two voices. A verb is considered to be in the active voice when the subject of the sentence performs the action of the verb, such as *Marco ha preparato le valigie* – Marco packed the suitcases. A verb is considered to be in the passive voice when the subject is acted on by the verb, such as *La scena è stata filmata da un famoso regista* – The scene was filmed by a famous director. Only transitive verbs with a clear direct object can be changed from the active voice to the passive voice.

You start everyday with reflexive verbs – *verbi riflessivi*. These verbs revert the action to the subject such as *Mi lavo* – I wash myself. In Italian reflexive pronouns – *I pronomi riflessivi* are needed when conjugating reflexive verbs.

In Italian there are three important verbs known as *verbi servili* or *verbi modali* – modal verbs. These verbs are *potere* – to be able to, can, *volere* – to want, *dovere* – to have

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to, must, can take on their given meaning and stand alone. Functioning to modify the meaning of these verbs, they can follow the infinitive of other verbs.

There are a group of Italian verbs that are conjugated with two different pronoun particles. Included in this group of verbs is *meravigliarsene* and *provarcisi* and are called pronominal verbs – *verbi pronominali*. There are still grouped with either the first conjugation, second conjugation or the third conjugation according to the ending of their infinitives.

To the dismay of students of all levels and abilities there is no hard and fast set of rules governing the grammatical usage of these next verbs with prepositions. There are certain verbs, which are followed by specific prepositions such as *a*, *di*, *per*, and *su*.

Because of the unspecified rules with these verbs and preposition usage, students must familiarize themselves with tables, which include Italian verbs and expressions followed by specific prepositions as well as verbs followed directly by the infinitive.

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## 26 Pronouncing Italian Vowels

The correct pronunciation in Italian can be difficult for some beginners. Yet it is standard and stays the same. Once the rules are understood it is simple to pronounce each word correctly. Here are some step by step instructions on how to pronounce the Italian vowels.

A – sounds like a in father

E – has two sounds: short vowel like e in pen and the long vowel similar to ai in fair

I – sounds like ea in tea.

O – has two sounds: like o in cozy or similar of o in cost

U – sounds like u in rude.

Italian vowels are always spoken in a sharp, clear fashion; they should never be slurred or pronounced weakly. Vowels always keep their value in diphthongs. Italian is a phonetic language. This means it is spoken exactly the way it is written. Italian and English use the same Latin alphabet, but the sounds by the letters are different in the two languages.

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## 27 Pronouncing Italian Consonants

In Italian pronunciation can be difficult especially for beginners. Yet much like the vowels the sound each consonant makes is a regular sound and remains the same, so once the rules are understood, it is simple to pronounce the words correctly. Here are the step by step instructions on the way the consonants are pronounced in Italian.

The consonants B, F, M, N, and V are pronounced exactly as they are in English. When the C is before a, o, u and before a consonant it has the sound similar to the English letter K. When the C comes before the e and I it sounds very similar to the English sound of the Ch.

D is much more explosive in Italian than it is in English; with the tongue near the tip of the upper teeth but with no aspiration.

When G comes before a, o, and u and before consonants it sounds like the g in good; when it comes before e and i it sounds like the g in general.

Gli sounds like ll in million and Gn sounds like they ny in canyon.

The H in Italian is silent.

The L sounds like it does in English except with a sharper tone and more forward in the mouth.

P sounds as it does in English, but without the aspiration, which sometimes happens in English.

Qu sounds as it does in English like in the word quest.

R is very different from the English; it is pronounced with one flip of the tongue against the gums of the upper teeth. This will make the trill sound of the r.

S before vowels and unvoiced consonants such as c, f, p, q, s, t is pronounced like the s in the English word rose.

T is pretty much like the T in English, but with no escaping of breath to go along with it in the Italian.

Z can be voiced, like ds in beds, or it can be voiceless, like ts in bets.

All Italian consonants have a corresponding double consonant, whose pronunciation is similar to, but not exactly like the single consonant. The mispronunciation of the double consonants can result in miscommunication.

Italian is known as a musical language because every sound is clear and distinct but stays soft rather than hard. The consonants will never lose their sound value even when linked together with syllables and words.

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When they say Italian is a phonetic language, they mean it is spoken the way it is written. Italian and English share the Latin alphabet, but the pronunciation of each letter differs between the two languages.

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## 28 Pronouncing Italian Words

If you enjoy listening to the sounds as the opera and listening to the voices of the Italian stars in foreign film, then you will love learning to speak Italian. Here are some step by step instructions on the correct way to pronounce the Italian words.

Most Italian words are stressed on the next to the last syllable.

When the final –e is omitted from a word, as it sometimes happens with some of the masculine titles, and they are immediately followed by a proper name, the position of the stress remains the same.

Keep in mind the above rule, *dottore* – doctor becomes *dottor Nardi* – Doctor Nardi and *professore* – professor becomes *professor Pace* – Professor Pace.

If the last vowel in a word is to be stressed, there will be an accent over that vowel.

It is important to remember that open e and o occur only in stressed syllables.

The written accent is used with a few monosyllables as a way to distinguish them from others that have the same spelling, but the words have a different meaning.

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## 29 What is Phonology?

Phonology according to Marian Nespors, and Italian linguist and author of the book “Fonologia”, it is the part of grammar that deals with the sounds made in natural languages for communicating meanings. Basically what that boils down to is the study of the meanings of the sounds we make as we speak.

There is an important fact we must make clear and that is there is a difference between phonology and phonetics. Phonetics analyzes all sound coming from human speech, the meaning and the language does not matter. Where as phonology takes and studies the sound in its environment. Patterns are sought by determining which sounds contain meaning. Then explain how these sounds are understood by a native speaker. Phonetics may study how the letter “T” is produced and how it seems to be, while phonology analyzes how the words fa and va have different meanings, even though there is only one differing sound. In other words phonology is the musical side of languages.

When you are listening to Italian notice the difference in the rhythm the language is spoken in as opposed to the rhythm English is spoken. There is a noticeable difference between the two. Phonological investigations have been conducted by linguists to study the various rhythmic patterns of languages. With the use of computer programs, the linguists replaced all the consonants with the letter “s” and all the vowels were replaced with the letter “a”. The end results showed each language differs by only its own musicality.

The path to learning to speak a language as a native speaker is blocked with barriers you, which are apparent, such as accents, and vocabularies, but even with the mastery of both is really not enough. The subtle barriers not as easily spotted are the proper inflection and intonation and knowing where to place the correct stress are the more musical aspects of the languages. Phonology is the study, which will help to point out these obscure keys to fluency and is a basis on which other aspects of linguistic can begin their studies.

The crossroads between phonology and morphology is where there is an interesting mystery of words; linguists find it difficult to define the exact properties of a word. At first it may be apparent why; for those who are learning Italian you will need to pay close attention to how changes are made in what you hear, such as from the nonsense sounds to words full of meaning. This will be important as you progress in learning a new vocabulary. You may be tempted to use phonological clues, such as tone, stress, and pauses for breath to classify a word, but as you will see this may not be a correct assumption.

Phonology is a wide ranging subject, which covers other questions with complicated names, such as assimilation, epenthesis, the adding sounds to words, and phonotactics sound combinations are allowed within a given language. Then there are subjects with much more simpler terms, such as the mysterious properties of the letter “s” in Italian. These are all interesting topics because of the misconception, which surrounds them. It

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is however, through the mastery of puzzles like these that you can come almost to the understanding of Italian, whether you are a native speaker or not.

## **30 Summary**

As a beginner learning Italian can be very rewarding and inspiring, or it can be an extremely frustrating and miserable experience. Whether or not you enjoy studying Italian depends on your attitude, your expectations and your learning technique.

Here are some tips on how to learn Italian.

Find an Italian course you like and make sure you stick to it. Don't go with just any old course, the cheapest one, or even the one that is the most advertised. Check what they look like and sound like. One of the keys to success in learning Italian is finding the course you like. If you like the course chances are greatly you will stick with it.

Have fun while you are learning. Make the lessons fun. While you are out with friends include your Italian lessons, by naming the Italian word for what you see. If you like reading book, or watching a movie, get the Italian version of the book or the movie without the subtitles. They can be distracting. You could even play an Italian version of your favorite video game.

Be realistic about your expectations. Don't set your goals so high that they are unattainable. Failing to meet your deadline you set for yourself will only discourage you. Chances are you will not stick with the course when facing constant failure. Expect to forget a lot of what you have learned that is normal. Remember progress is never steady, you will find you will learn more some days than others. It's okay.

Learn at least one new word every session. Studying a foreign language is a psychological game. You need to feel like you are getting somewhere or you will want to quit. By learning a new word every lesson or day, you will feel like you are getting there even if it is slowly.

Establish some long term goals and focus on them. If you are learning Italian to be able to speak to people and to be able to understand them as well, those are the skills you will want to focus on. Make sure the course you select emphasizes the aspects of learning the language you want to focus on. If it is just speaking and understand, you don't want a course that spends the majority of your time reading and writing.

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